

REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

DATE ISSUED: October 29, 2003

REPORT NO. P-03-336

ATTENTION: Planning Commission
Agenda of November 6, 2003

SUBJECT: Balboa Park Land Use, Circulation and Parking Study

OWNER: City of San Diego

APPLICANT: City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department

SUMMARY

This is a workshop item. No action is required on the part of the Planning Commission.

BACKGROUND

In June of 2002, the City Park and Recreation Department received funding to initiate a study to evaluate long-term land use, circulation and parking needs for the Central Mesa and Inspiration Point areas of Balboa Park. The study would also include recommendations for the location of parking structures within the park. The study is considered to be the first step in the update of the Balboa Park Master Plan, the Central Mesa Precise Plan and the Inspiration Point Precise Plan.

The Park and Recreation Department issued a Request for Qualifications to solicit planning and design firms for the implementation of the land use, circulation and parking study. A total of seven consulting firms were interviewed for the project. The interview panel selected the consulting team of Jones and Jones Architects and Landscape Architects, Inc. to provide the required services.

The consultant team kicked off the public participation portion of the study at the January 2003 Balboa Park Committee meeting. The Balboa Park Committee is acting as the steering committee for the project and is the host of all community meetings.

The project approach consists of four separate stages of work. Each stage of work culminates in a public forum, where the findings are presented to the community as a whole. During each stage of work, numerous stakeholder interviews and workshops are held to solicit the input of Balboa Park maintenance and operations staff, institutions and users.

Completed Stages:

Stage One of the project was the Discovery Stage. The consultant team has reviewed all applicable policy documents that govern Balboa Park, conducted numerous stakeholder interviews and walked and observed the park to learn more about how the park functions. The consultants also reviewed existing and proposed plans both within and around Balboa Park that may have an impact on the Park. The findings of the Discovery Stage were reported to the Balboa Park Committee and the community at the first Public Forum on April 3, 2003.

Stage Two of the project was the Findings and Options Stage. The consultant team continued to conduct stakeholder interviews, and also held numerous workshops with Balboa Park organizations and institutions, community planning groups and City staff. The consultants used the information gathered in their previous efforts to generate separate options for addressing land use, circulation and parking. The options were then combined to create “scenarios”, or schematic plans, to provide a vision for the park. Three schematic plans were prepared for community input. The options and schematic plans were presented to the Balboa Park Committee and the community at the second Public Forum on July 10, 2003.

Stage Three of the study, the Preliminary Draft Plan stage, has just been completed. The effort for this stage of the project consisted of refinement of the schematic plans based on input at the second Public Forum as well as additional workshops that were held with the community planning groups, Park institutions and City staff. The refined schematic plans were presented at the third Public Forum, which was held on October 2, 2003. The preferred plan is being refined based on input received from the third Public Forum and from the upcoming committee review process, culminating in recommendations that will be presented at the fourth Public Forum in January 2004.

The Land Use, Circulation and Parking Study received input not only from community and park user groups but also from officially recognized advisory bodies. These advisory bodies include:

- The Greater Golden Hill Planning Committee
- The Greater North Park Community Planning Group
- Uptown Community Planning Group
- Centre City Development Corporation
- The Balboa Park Committee
- The Park and Recreation Design Review Committee

- The Historical Resources Board Design Assistance Subcommittee
- The Park and Recreation Board

Future Stage:

The consultant team is currently working on the Final Draft Plan stage of the study. Additional workshops with the Balboa Park Committee, the Planning Commission and other stakeholders will help further refine the Final Draft Plan. The results of this stage of work will be presented at the fourth Public Forum in January 2004. Final recommendations and actions from advisory bodies will be solicited at upcoming public meetings. The calendar of upcoming advisory body meetings is as follows:

- November 6, 2003 Balboa Park Committee
Workshop Item
- December 4, 2003 Balboa Park Committee Action
Endorsement of the Final Draft Plan
- December 10, 2003 Park and Recreation Design Review Committee Action
Endorsement of the Final Draft Plan
- December 18, 2003 Park and Recreation Board Action
Endorsement of the Final Draft Plan
- January 22, 2004 Planning Commission Action
Authorization to Initiate Plan Amendments
- February, 2004 Natural Resources and Culture Committee
Review of the Final Draft Plan

DISCUSSION

The magic of Balboa Park is the balance between park and cultural experiences. The primary focus of the Land Use, Circulation and Parking Study is to maintain a balance that; 1) enhances the quality of both park and culture, 2) improves the integrity of park land, 3) supports healthy cultural institutions, and 4) increases public access to park land.

To improve park integrity, several objectives have been identified. These objectives include improvement of connections and reduction of fragmentation, to use natural landscapes to connect habitats in the canyons and mesas, to use historic landscapes to inspire new cultivated landscapes, to enhance views in the park and to the region, and to reclaim damaged and under-utilized lands.

The health of the cultural institutions is essential to the balance of Balboa Park. Objectives of the study are to maintain the viability of existing cultural institutions, enhance the recreational, educational and entertainment experiences, utilize the existing buildings as incubators for culture and institutions, and preservation of historic buildings and landscapes.

Another goal of the study is to increase public access to parkland. The public currently has access to a majority of Balboa Park, either for free or by paying admission. However, some areas within the park are not accessible due to extractions or restrictions. Examples of extractions include the Naval Hospital site, State highways and schools. Examples of restricted lands include the Pershing maintenance yard, the Balboa Park nursery, the Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts camps and the Campfire Girls/Boys camp. The Arizona Landfill is accessible, but has limited uses at this time. The objectives for increasing public access include prevention of further restricted uses within the park, returning restricted uses to public use, prevent future extractions of land from the park, and returning extracted lands to general park use when a change of status occurs.

Land Use:

Land Use is a key area of this study. Throughout the study, the consultant team has developed a set of land use principals to help guide them and the community in the decision-making process. These principals are as follows:

- Define and enhance unique spaces in the park
- Support spaces for people
- Manage appropriate expansions of uses
- Maintain service and access to buildings
- Minimize conflicts between special events and daily uses
- Enhance the core pedestrian areas
- Plazas are for people
- Preserve and enhance open spaces
- Eliminate non-public uses which limit access
- Remove non-park uses from the park

Circulation:

Circulation is the next key area for this study. The consultant team has analyzed parking and circulation patterns within Balboa Park and has developed the following principals:

- Enhance the sense of arrival with strong gateways that are clear, safe and inviting
- Create meaningful connections, both physically and visually
- Connections should be clear, convenient and universally accessible
- Maximize access to transit
- Provide a fast, efficient shuttle system to link parking and destinations
- Create more access for pedestrians and bicycles

- Maintain reasonable auto access and service
- Improve links from parking to destinations
- Connect regional transit and pedestrian cores
- Connect all of the parts of the park together
- Maximize pedestrian mobility within the park
- Minimize auto circulation in pedestrian cores
- Maximize the periphery of the park for unrestricted public access

Parking:

Parking within Balboa Park is the final component to this study. The consultant team has reviewed data provided by the cultural institutions and has conducted surveys of park visitors. Their analysis has revealed that there is not adequate parking for future growth in Balboa Park. Also, the existing parking supply is not distributed where it is most needed. The consultant team has developed the following principals for parking issues:

- Dispersed parking structures
- Capture vehicles in parking structures near key entrances and destinations
- Minimize/manage parking in pedestrian cores
- Manage employee/volunteer parking
- Minimize land requirements
- Minimize visual impacts (remove, bury, structure, buffer, etc.)
- Distribute parking equitably
- Manage and maintain on-street parking where appropriate
- Limit expansion of parking to remote parking
- Manage service access
- Provide suitable disabled parking access

Park Boulevard Promenade Project Compatibility:

The Park Boulevard Promenade project proposes a 4800-space parking structure in a centralized location to serve Zoo and North Prado users in a new multi-level subterranean structure located on a portion of the site of the existing parking lot adjacent to the Zoo and extending south towards the Prado. The Park Boulevard Promenade project also includes a Zoo employee parking lot on the northwestern edge of the existing Zoo leasehold.

The Balboa Park Land Use, Circulation and Parking Study (Jones and Jones study) Preliminary Draft recommends: a) multiple structures for visitor parking to be distributed at east and west Prado, Palisades and Inspiration Point, b) employee parking to be relocated to more distant locations, c) an efficient shuttle system to link the park destinations with parking locations and d) a plan to reduce vehicle traffic and enhance the pedestrian character of the plazas and corridors throughout the park. Phase 1 of the Preliminary Draft for the Balboa Park Land Use, Circulation and Parking Study proposes new parking structures at the site of the existing Zoo lot (3200-3500 spaces, mostly for

Zoo visitors), in the vicinity of the archery range to the west of the Museum of Man (700-750 spaces, mostly for Prado visitors), at Inspiration Point (1500-2000 spaces, for Palisades visitors, overflow from all sites, and for park and institution employees), and a Zoo employee parking lot on the northwestern edge of the existing Zoo leasehold as proposed in the Park Boulevard Promenade project. In Phase 2 of the Preliminary Draft study two additional parking structures are proposed just south of the R.H. Fleet Science Center and east of the Hall of Champions, as visitor demand grows.

The two planning efforts are compatible in that: 1) a large parking structure is desired and needed in the North Prado, 2) a Zoo employee parking lot is recommended to be located in the north western corner of the existing Zoo leasehold, 3) a green belt/pedestrian Promenade is recommended along Park Boulevard, and 4) a large portion of the existing Zoo parking lot be returned to park use, which includes Zoo exhibits.

The size of the Park Boulevard Promenade parking structure is proposed to be 4800 spaces based on parking demand studies and input from stakeholder groups as part of the Working Group process. The Park Boulevard Promenade parking structure proposal addresses the parking needs of the Zoo and the North Prado area and was never intended to be a park-wide solution.

The Balboa Park Land Use, Circulation and Parking Study Phase 1 proposes to place three parking structures in the Prado area to satisfy parking demand. Future parking demand studies that will be conducted as part of the Balboa Park Land Use, Circulation and Parking Study will produce more refined data on where and how many parking spaces are needed for visitors and employees in 2020. These future studies will also be looking at traffic impacts, visual quality issues and other similar considerations. With these new studies, the appropriate mix of structure/parking area size and location to serve park visitors will then be determined. If the studies show that the option of the three structures reduce the parking need for the Zoo, the Park Promenade structure could be reduced from the proposed 4800 spaces to 3200-3500 spaces.

In recognition of the importance of these future studies, staff recommends that for the interim, both the Preliminary Draft for the Balboa Park Land Use, Circulation and Parking Study and the Park Boulevard Promenade project show the North Prado parking structure size as 3200-4800 spaces.

CONCLUSION

The project has received extensive input from numerous stakeholders, community groups, institutions and City staff. The Preliminary Draft Plan is a culmination of the efforts of the consultant team, the Balboa Park Committee and the community. The goals and objectives of the study have served as guidelines for the preparation of the proposed Preliminary Draft Plan, and will continue to do so throughout future stages of the project.

The Final Draft Plan will be reviewed by the Balboa Park Committee, the Park and Recreation Design Review Committee, the Park and Recreation Board, the Planning Commission and the Natural Resources and Culture Committee. Upon approval of the Final Draft Plan and identification of funding for Phase 2 of the study, the Park and Recreation Department will direct the consultant team in the preparation of amendments or updates to the applicable policy documents that govern Balboa Park. These documents include the Balboa Park Master Plan, the Central Mesa Precise Plan, the Inspiration Point Precise Plan (not adopted) and all subsequent amendments to these documents.

Respectfully submitted,

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Park and Recreation Director

EO/cd

Attachment(s):

1. Preliminary Draft Plan Slide Presentation
2. White Paper for the October 2nd Public Forum
3. White Paper for the July 10th Public Forum